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RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 2329
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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 2844
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RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 5808
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000324

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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Iran

Key stories in the media:

All media led with the suicide bombing that took place in a neighborhood bakery in Eilat on Monday morning -- the first such

incident in the city. Media reported that one of the victims, Yisrael Smolia, was a new immigrant from Peru whose entire family lives in the US. The authorities are unsure about how the terrorist, Islamic Jihad operative Muhammad Faisal Saksak, 21, of Gaza City, made his way to Eilat after probably crossing the border from Egypt. Leading media found indications that the attack was meant to restore unity among Palestinians. Media reported that the White House and the EU condemned the bombing. White House Press Secretary Tony Snow was quoted as saying in a statement on Monday

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that the Palestinian Authority was responsible for preventing such attacks. "Failure to act against terror will inevitably affect relations between that government and the international community and undermine the aspirations of the Palestinian people for a state of their own," Snow was quoted as saying. Leading media reported that Jordan's King Abdullah II also condemned the assault.

The Jerusalem Post wrote that the IDF was ordered on Monday night to prepare plans to target Palestinian terror organizations and Islamic Jihad terror chiefs in the Gaza Strip. Yediot reported that on Monday, during a security meeting, Defense Minister Amir Peretz rejected those recommendations by the army. Conversely, The Jerusalem Post reported that Peretz called for an end to Israel's policy of restraint. Ha'aretz bannered PM Ehud Olmert's reported intention to maintain the cease-fire in the Gaza Strip and not to respond with a broad military offensive. Leading media wrote that in addition to the problem of the porous boundary with Egypt, Israel's intelligence in the Gaza Strip is growing weaker.

Israel Radio reported that last night the IAF struck a tunnel at the Karni crossing, and quoted a senior GOI source as saying that the hit is not linked to the Eilat bombing.

The Jerusalem Post cited the State Department as saying this week that there has been no change of policy on Hamas despite Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's characterization of the group as a "resistance movement. The newspaper quoted Rice as saying in speaking to reporters in Berlin on January 18, discussing the situation of Palestinians in the year 2000: "You had Hamas, of course, sitting out as a resistance movement, not at all, by the way, involved in the politics at all."

Media reported that the cabinet is expected to approve the appointment of Maj. Gen. (reserves) Gabi Ashkenazi as the next IDF chief of staff at its next meeting. The committee in charge of evaluating senior civil service appointments approved Ashkenazi's appointment on Monday. In addition, three Supreme Court Justices ruled on Monday that the government is entitled to appoint without delay a new chief of staff before the Winograd Committee, which is investigating the second Lebanon war, issues an interim report on its findings. The court thereby rejected a petition filed by the Movement for Quality Government and Almagor, a group representing victims of terror, which had argued that it would be wrong to name a new chief of staff before the Winograd Committee's interim report is available. Ashkenazi is expected to take over at the General Staff in another two weeks.

Maariv and The Jerusalem Post reported that Vice PM Shimon Peres has left for an official visit to Qatar. Maariv said that this will be the first time Peres will appear before Arab students in an Arab country.

Ha'aretz and Maariv reported that a new ministerial committee decided on Monday that more police officers will be assigned to areas of the West Bank with a high incidence of illegal activity by Jewish settlers, and that the use of restraining orders against right-wing extremists who are suspected of violence against Palestinians will be increased.

Leading media reported that fighting between rival Palestinian factions continued on Monday despite a Saudi offer to host talks between Hamas and Fatah.

Maariv reported that the US is concerned that Latin American countries might become a jumping-off point for terrorists intent on operating in the US. The newspaper cited the fear of US intelligence that Iran's alliances with Venezuela and Nicaragua might assist the trend. Maariv reported that over 10,000 Iranians

have visited Yad Vashem's Farsi-language website since it was first opened last Thursday. Yediot quoted Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Hassan Kazemi as saying on Monday in an interview with The New York Times that Iran should replace the US in the reconstruction of Iraq.

Yediot quoted former FM Shlomo Ben-Ami as saying in an address to the Spanish Parliament (Cortes) that Israel is a prisoner of the paranoia of Holocaust remembrance and that it should stop comparing Saddam Hussein and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Hitler.

Ha'aretz quoted prominent Israeli demographer Sergio Della Pergola, who was an adviser to Israeli governments and the Jerusalem Municipality, as writing in a book to be published by the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies that Israel should concede parts of Jerusalem with a Palestinian majority. Della Pergola was quoted as saying that by 2020, if the present ratio continues, only 60 percent of the population of Jerusalem will be Jewish.

Yediot reported that on Monday dozens of senior IDF reserve officers presented a petition to Olmert demanding that former PM Ehud Barak be named defense minister. The officers clarified that their move was not part of the Labor Party primaries.

Yediot cited Attorney General Menachem Mazuz's belief that Israel's President Moshe Katsav should leave his official residence ahead of his hearing.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Ben-Gurion University Prof. Dan. G. Blumberg as saying that geomorphologists from his university have been collaborating with NASA scientists in using the Negev and other deserts as analogs to understand windblown formations and how they affect the landscape. The experiments are meant to simulate atmospheric conditions on Mars. Leading media reported that NASA sent two astronauts and one of its chief science officers to Israel this week to take part in a series of consultations and lectures. The NASA delegation will also take part in the second annual Ilan Ramon International Space Conference at the Israel Air Force Center's Fisher Brothers Institute in Herzliya on Wednesday.

The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that on Monday morning Israel was the world's first country to see the long-awaited edition of Microsoft's Vista operating system, even before Bill Gates and company were due to launch it in New York. Israel Radio reported that Google has opened its first R&D center in Haifa with 10 employees. The radio said that Google will open another one in Tel Aviv.

Erratum: In Monday's Israel Media Reaction we omitted the name -- Ir Amim -- of the non-profit organization that recently reported that Israel has neglected Arab neighborhoods that are within Jerusalem's municipal boundaries but outside the West Bank separation fence. The item appeared in Ha'aretz.

Yediot cited the results of a poll conducted among high school students hailing from the Commonwealth of Independent States and commissioned by the Gertner Institute:
-39 percent of junior high school students and 30 percent of high school students would prefer not to enlist in the IDF.
-33 percent of junior high school students and 44 percent of high school students would like to live elsewhere, mainly in the US or Europe.

Mideast:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The Arab states say they want peace. They say, privately, that they are very concerned about Iran. Now is the time to take real action on both fronts, by working directly to defuse the Iranian campaign to ignite the entire region."

Journalist and far-Left peace activist Uri Avnery wrote in NRG, the Internet site of the popular, pluralist Maariv: "If Arafat were

alive we would have a clear address for engaging in negotiations with the Palestinian people."

Block Quotes:

I. "Defuse the Conflict"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (1/30): "In the context of the Eilat attack and the growing intra-Palestinian violence, the policy of Israel and other countries of providing funds and even weapons to Abbas in the hopes of encouraging 'moderation' needs to be reexamined. There are better ways to promote real, not just relative, moderation among Palestinians. We note that Saudi Arabia, for the first time, has invited all Palestinian factions to join in talks to end the fighting between them. This squares with the claims of a confluence of interests between Arab states, Israel and the US, all of whom are concerned with the Iranian threat.... That the Saudis and other Arab states are concerned about Iran is not theory, but fact.... The Arab states say they want peace. They say, privately, that they are very concerned about Iran. Now is the time to take real action on both fronts, by working directly to defuse the Iranian campaign to ignite the entire region."

II. "My Longings For Arafat"

Journalist and far-Left peace activist Uri Avnery wrote in NRG, the Internet site of the popular, pluralist Maariv (1/30: "'If only Arafat were alive.' One hears that sentence more and more, and not only in conversations with Palestinians but also with Israelis and foreigners.... If Arafat were alive we would have a clear address for engaging in negotiations with the Palestinian people. The absence of such an address is currently the Israeli government's formal excuse for its unwillingness to begin peace negotiations. Every time either Condoleezza Rice or some other parrot of President Bush talks about the need to 'renew the dialogue' (but does not mention 'negotiations') about the 'final status' or the 'permanent arrangement' (but does not mention 'peace'), that is the answer that is furnished by Tzipi Livni, Ehud Olmert and company.... At the conference of billionaires in Davos, Tzipi Livni, Condi's new friend ... publicly warned Abu Mazen not to make 'compromises with terrorists.' That was a timely warning. In a desperate attempt to create a credible Palestinian address Abu Mazen flew to Damascus to meet with Khaled Mashal. By so doing, he admitted publicly that nothing could be done without the Hamas leader, who has become the supreme president of the Palestinian people. Livni quickly identified the danger and swiftly torpedoed the process. There isn't going to be any dialogue with a Palestinian unity government, just like there isn't going to be any dialogue with either Abu Mazen or Hamas. Do you understand that, Condi dearest?"

2. Iran:

Summary:

Columnist Yonatan Rosenblum wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "If Bush does not act against the Iranian nuclear infrastructure before he completes his term, it would be almost impossible to imagine any heir -- be he a Democrat or a Republican -- who would do so."

Block Quotes:

"Steadfast In His Determination"

Columnist Yonatan Rosenblum wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (1/30): "From Israel's point of view, the most important part of President Bush's speech earlier this month, in which he outlined a new American move in Iraq, is the statement: 'We will interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria. And we will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq.' The New York Sun believes that this pronouncement is akin to a virtual declaration of war an Iran and Syria.... If

Bush does not act, Israel will have no choice but to try to do it itself.... [But] the most important is that the US has a military capability that goes far beyond Israel's.... If Bush does not act against the Iranian nuclear infrastructure before he completes his term, it would be almost impossible to imagine any heir -- be he a Democrat or a Republican -- who would do so."

JONES